

# English Language Learning Demotivation of University Students

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## ABSTRACT

*The theories on second language acquisition (SLA) differently estimate the importance of individual factors in language acquisition. Within those factors, the importance of motivation as well as demotivation is essential. Motivation is extremely important during demanding learning process. The first objective of this study is focused on determining the correlations between factors of demotivation (DM) during learning English as a foreign language (LEFL) with factors of motivation (M), as well as with chosen relevant variables. The second objective is focused on determining the differences between factors of demotivation during LEFL in relation to gender, year of study and programme of study. The study was conducted among students enrolled in 3-year undergraduate study programmes at the University of Dubrovnik. The Questionnaire for Measuring Type and Intensity of Motivation of Croatian Students for Learning English as a Foreign Language was applied as a research instrument. The results indicate the absence of statistically significant differences in DM factors, according to gender, programme and year of study. However, a statistically significant, moderately high and negative association of pragmatic-communicative and affective factors of motivation with demotivation has been established, while the other correlations between DM and M are very low. On the other hand, a statistically significant, negative and low correlation with DM factors has been found for the final grade students only. The findings suggest the need for further research based on a context-specific approach to understanding demotivation in LEFL.*

**Key words:** demotivation, language learning, English, students

## Introduction

The rapid changes in the contemporary way of life, induced by the globalisation processes, technological advances and mobility of people and assets brought attention to the importance of communication among people from all over the world. Attention has been drawn to learning foreign languages. The process of second language acquisition has proven to be complex and varied thus resulting in a plethora of theories, all of them aiming to better understand the language learning process. The success in SLA varies from individual to individual and it depends on many factors. Within numerous factors that have an impact on SLA, the importance of motivation as well as demotivation is essential. Recent theories on SLA focus on the importance of individual factors. Gardner<sup>1</sup> distinguishes the cognitive and affective characteristics of individual factors. He puts motivation, along with attitudes and anxiety, among the affective factors. According to Mihaljević Djigunović<sup>2</sup> it is commonly accepted nowadays that during the foreign language learning process both cognitive and affective learner qualities are activated.

## Motivation in second language acquisition

Nevertheless, motivation is considered to be one of the most complex and most important factors which directly influence the language learning process and the learning results<sup>3,4</sup>. Many researchers have attempted to come up with a comprehensive and single definition of motivation, but so far without success. In 2006, Gardner<sup>5</sup> defined motivation as a general characteristic of the individual that applies to any opportunity to learn the language. His socio-educational model conceptualises motivation as the sum of the effort, desire to learn and positive attitudes<sup>5</sup>. More recently, Dörnyei<sup>3</sup> defines motivation as the initial stimulus for learning language and the driving force to sustain the long and arduous learning process. He constructed the second language (L2) motivational self-system which comprises the ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience<sup>3</sup>.

## Demotivation in second language acquisition

On the other hand, demotivation is a relatively new and still under-researched area in the field of SLA. While mo-

tivation might be considered to have a positive influence on learning language, demotivation has the negative effect on success in SLA. It is important to look into demotivation as perhaps one of the main causes for the language learning failure. According to Oxford<sup>6</sup>, demotivation is a process that can be best understood by asking students to recall their learning experiences over a period of time. Dörnyei<sup>3</sup>, however, defines demotivation as concerning specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an on-going action. In other words, demotivation could be regarded as the negative counterpart of motivation<sup>3</sup>.

The previous research on demotivation focused mainly on identifying the demotivating factors. Gorham and Christophel conducted two separate studies on the students' demotivation for learning<sup>7,8</sup>. One study implemented qualitative methodology, while the other was a quantitative study. Nevertheless, both studies provided rather consistent results. Namely, the participants mainly attributed demotivation to their teacher (two-thirds of demotivators were attributed to the teacher)<sup>7,8</sup>. Thus, the teacher was the main demotivating factor and described as boring, unorganised and unprepared, but also unapproachable, biased and in some cases even insulting. Other factors included the teaching material, grading and the dislike for the language<sup>7,8</sup>. Their general finding was that negative teacher behaviour was central to students' demotivation<sup>7,8</sup>. Oxford attempted to identify demotivating factors by analysing information from written essays collected from 250 students over a period of five years<sup>6</sup>. The research findings identified four demotivators, out of which three were related to the teacher (personal relationship with the students, attitude towards the course or the material, style conflicts between teachers and students) and the fourth demotivator was identified as the nature of the classroom activities (irrelevance, overload and repetitiveness).<sup>6</sup> Dörnyei in 2001 conducted a study focusing specifically on demotivated students, who were identified as demotivated according to their teachers and peers<sup>9</sup>. He conducted one-to-one interviews with the students asking them about their bad learning experiences. Nine main demotivating factors were identified<sup>9</sup>. The teacher was the most frequent source of demotivation in 40% of the cases. Other demotivating factors involved reduced self-confidence, inadequate school facilities, negative attitude towards L2, compulsory nature of study, interference with another foreign language (FL), negative attitude towards L2 community, attitudes of group members and course book<sup>9</sup>. Williams, Burden and Lanvers<sup>10</sup> carried out a study to determine whether there was any relationship among students' demotivation with respect to gender, age and the language. The results of their study indicated that male students were more demotivated than their female peers, and that there was a negative relationship between age and level of motivation<sup>10</sup>. Muhonen<sup>11</sup> conducted a research on 91 students who were learning LEFL as a compulsory subject in Finland and were asked to do a writing task. This study identified 5 demotivating factors. The teacher was the primary source of demotivation (58.6%), specifically his/her teaching methods, lack of competence and

personality<sup>11</sup>. Other factors were the learning material, learner characteristics, school environment and learner's attitude towards English language. Regarding gender, only slight differences were found, male students were just slightly more inclined to attribute demotivation to the teacher than the female ones<sup>11</sup>. Trang and Baldauf<sup>12</sup> researched demotivation on a sample of 100 students learning English as a compulsory subject in Vietnam. The students were asked to recall their English learning experiences and to write an essay. Their findings revealed three main categories of demotives: context demotives, structure/format demotives and teacher behaviours<sup>12</sup>. Consistent with the results of previous research on demotivation the study revealed that the largest source of demotives was related to teachers, in particular the teaching methods. The students were also demotivated due to poor pre-knowledge of English.

### *Croatian research on motivation and demotivation in second language acquisition*

In Croatia, Mihaljević Djigunović<sup>2,13</sup> carried out an extensive study involving three different sets of participants to construct an instrument for researching motivation for LEFL in Croatia. To determine the motivational types in the Croatian context, after a thorough research, an instrument for measuring the type and intensity of motivation was construed<sup>2,13</sup>. These findings indicated three motivational types for learning English in Croatia: pragmatic-communicative motivation, affective motivation and integrative motivation, and two demotivators: *the teaching setting demotivator* and *the learning difficulties demotivator*. The teaching setting demotivator involved the teacher, teaching materials and teaching methodology, while the learning difficulties involved lack of basic pre-knowledge, seeing English as too complicated, etc<sup>13</sup>.

The scope of this study is focused primarily on the factors of demotivation (DM) during learning English as a foreign language (LEFL), among students enrolled in 3-year undergraduate study programmes at two different departments at the University of Dubrovnik.

Having taken into consideration the importance of demotivation in second language acquisition, the **first set of objectives** of this study are focused on determining the differences between factors of demotivation during LEFL in relation to gender, year of study and programme of study. The second objective is focused on determining the correlations between factors of demotivation (DM) during learning English as a foreign language with factors of motivation (M), as well as with chosen relevant variables.

Our initial **hypothesis** is that no differences in demotivation between students enrolled in two different study programmes (Maritime Department and Mass Communications Department) and between students from different years of study are to be expected, having in mind the similar socio-educational context. Finally, no differences in demotivation for learning EFL with regard to gender can be expected. Male students are predominantly enrolled in the Maritime Department, while the Mass Communications Department has significantly larger number of fe-

male students. In the maritime profession English is the standard communication language, while in the mass communications the importance of foreign languages, especially English as lingua franca is undeniable. On the other hand, we supposed that some specific factors were responsible for motivation and some other for demotivation. Therefore, we expected that demotivation factors should be positively intercorrelated and motivation factors should be positively intercorrelated, but without positive cross-correlations between motivation and demotivation factors.

## Method

### Participants

The entire purposeful sample included 172 participants, within which two sub-samples were included, comprising all the students enrolled in 3-year undergraduate study programmes at two University of Dubrovnik Departments: Maritime Department and Mass Communications Department. The first sub-sample ( $N_1=107$ ) involved the students from the Maritime Department: 55 first year students, 27 second year students and 25 third year students, with median age 22. The students from the Maritime Department were mainly male students ( $N=101$ ), with only 6 female students, which was to be expected having in mind the professional orientation traditionally preferred by men. The second sub-sample consisted of the students from the Mass Communications Department ( $N_2=65$ ): 24 first year students, 23 second year students and 18 third year students. The median age of these students was 23. Most of the students were female ( $N=45$ ), with 20 male students.

### Instrument

The research instrument consisted of two parts. In the first part demographic data was collected: age, gender, the programme of study and the year of study. The second part was the Questionnaire for Measuring Type and Intensity of Motivation of Croatian Students for Learning English as a Foreign Language (TIMLEFL, by Mihaljevic Djigunovic<sup>2</sup>) used to measure three types of student motivation and two types of student demotivation for learning English as a foreign language. TIMLEFL is a self-evaluation instrument containing 38 statements. The students were to specify their agreement with each of the statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument showed an acceptable reliability type internal consistency. The results

revealed that all original dimensions of the instrument showed satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients as follows: pragmatic-communicative motivation (0.84), affective motivation (0.73), integral (0.65) motivation, teaching setting demotivator (0.50) and learning difficulties demotivator (0.76). Particularly low, but still acceptable, was the reliability revealed for teaching setting as the demotivator.

### Data collection and statistical analyses

The research was carried out at the University of Dubrovnik during regular English classes at the beginning of 2013 (students from both departments were tested within the same week). The participants were informed about the general purpose of the research without specifying the aim of the study to avoid bias. They were asked for sincere and accurate replies and all participants were granted anonymity. Relevant permissions from the Heads of Departments were timely obtained.

Statistical analysis was performed using the statistical package *SPSS 20.0*. To determine the differences in demotivation factors according to gender and programme of study, Mann Whitney U test was used, while Kruskal Wallis test was used to determine the differences according to year of study. Pearson correlation coefficients were used in the analysis of correlations between two types of demotivation and three types of motivation. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used as the measure of reliability in certain subscales of motivation and demotivation for SLA. Paired samples t-test was used to test overall differences between two types of demotivation.

## Results

**TABLE 1**  
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR DEMOTIVATION FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Demotivators	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Teaching setting	1.22	4.33	2.46	0.53
Learning difficulties	1.00	4.00	1.94	0.75

The testing of differences of descriptive indicators by paired samples t-test (Table 1), clearly indicated that the teaching setting was a stronger source of demotivation than the learning difficulties ( $t=10.27$ ;  $p<0.01$ ).

**TABLE 2**  
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DEMOTIVATION FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Type of demotivation	Mann-Whitney U test (p)	M Male (120)	s Male (120)	M Female (52)	s Female (52)
Teaching setting	0.27	2.48	0.50	2.41	0.59
Learning difficulties	0.16	1.99	0.77	1.82	0.72

Legend: M= Mean;  $\sigma$ = Standard Deviation

**TABLE 3**  
DIFFERENCES IN DEMOTIVATION FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO THE PROGRAMME OF STUDY

Type of demotivation	Mann-Whitney U test (p)	M Maritime (107)	s Maritime (107)	M Mass Communications (65)	s Mass Communications (65)
Teaching setting	0.27	2.47	0.47	2.44	0.62
Learning difficulties	0.23	1.98	0.73	1.88	0.80

Legend: M= Mean;  $\sigma$ = Standard Deviation

**TABLE 4**  
DIFFERENCES IN DEMOTIVATION FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO THE YEAR OF STUDY

Type of demotivation	Kruskal-Wallis test (p)	M 1 <sup>st</sup> year (79)	s 1 <sup>st</sup> year (79)	M 2 <sup>nd</sup> year (50)	s 2 <sup>nd</sup> year (50)	M 3 <sup>rd</sup> year (43)	s 3 <sup>rd</sup> year (43)
Teaching setting	0.34	2.39	0.49	2.50	0.50	2.54	0.63
Learning difficulties	0.65	1.90	0.75	2.02	0.79	1.92	0.72

Legend: M= Mean;  $\sigma$ = Standard Deviation

**TABLE 5**  
CORRELATION BETWEEN DEMOTIVATION AND MOTIVATION FACTORS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Variables of motivation and demotivation	Pragmatic-communicative motivation	Affective motivation	Integrative motivation	Teaching setting	Learning difficulties
Pragmatic-communicative motivation	1.00	0.72**	0.34**	-0.18*	-0.53**
Affective motivation		1.00	0.44**	-0.04	-0.42**
Integrative motivation			1.00	0.07	-0.01
Teaching setting				1.00	0.50**
Learning difficulties					1.00

Legend: \*\*correlation significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; \*correlation significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; Shaded – correlations of demotivation factors

Gender differences for two types of student demotivation for LEFL were analysed. As shown in Table 2 there are no statistically significant gender differences in the types of student demotivation for LEFL.

The insight in Table 3 indicates there are no statistically significant differences in demotivation factors for learning English as a foreign language in relation to the programme of study.

Table 4 shows that there are no statistically significant differences in demotivation factors for learning English as a foreign language, in relation to the students' year of study.

The results of the correlation analysis, as shown in Table 5, clearly indicate the positive inter-correlation of demotivation factors and also positive inter-correlations of motivation factors. On the other hand, learning difficulties are moderately negatively correlated with two motivation factors, pragmatic-communicative motivation and affective motivation. There is a negative correlation between pragmatic-communicative motivation and teaching setting.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The important role of individual factors in the language learning process is highly recognised nowadays. Demotivation is still an under-researched area and it is of utmost importance to carry out research of this phenomenon to fully understand the complex process of SLA. This research, while being merely a small contribution to the field, has confirmed the importance of researching demotivation for learning English as a foreign language in the Croatian socio-educational context. The hypothesis that some specific factors are responsible for motivation and some others for demotivation is strongly confirmed.

This research has shown that demotivation for learning English largely depends on the teacher, teaching materials and teaching methodology. The influence of the learning difficulties, such as lack of basic pre-knowledge and perception of EL as too difficult is not to be neglected as well. Our main finding is that different factors influence motivation for LEFL and demotivation. However, gender, the programme of study and the year of study



proved to be of no significance with respect to the level of demotivation.

The absence of gender differences is the finding which is consistent with some other studies on demotivation<sup>11</sup>. The absence of differences in demotivation for SLA by the type of the programme of the study confirms our initial hypothesis that students from the Mass Communications Department can in general have the same level of demotivation for learning EFL as the students from the Maritime Department. The reasons may lie in the nature of the both studies. English in the maritime world is official language of the trade and may be viewed by majority of the students as instrumental, a tool for obtaining a job. This explanation could be also applied to the students from the Mass Communications Department as they will rely on their language skills in their future professional life within the European Union or worldwide. Finally, there were no statistically significant differences in demotivation factors for learning English as a foreign language in relation to the year of study. This fact confirms our initial hypothesis that the year of study is a relatively short time for any significant differences to be shown, about the level of demotivation for learning English as a foreign language. However, statistically significant correlations between demotivation and two types of motivation (pragmatic-communicative and affective) have been established. In our previous study<sup>14</sup>, female students demonstrated higher levels of motivation for learning English than male students. Moreover, regarding the motivational types and intensity, the programme of study played an important role as well, in the direction that students from the Mass Communication Department were significantly more motivated to learn English as FL, than students from the Maritime Department<sup>14</sup>. However, the year of study has

proven to be nonsignificant, with respect to the level of motivation<sup>14</sup> or demotivation.

As discussed in our previous study<sup>14</sup>, the motivation for learning English largely depends on the students' awareness of the importance of English as the international language, as well as their pragmatic goals (employment, socialisation and integration into the global community). Hence, social factors at a more general level can affect motivation, such as the social dynamics or power relationship between the languages<sup>15</sup>. These factors could have similarly strong influence even on the factors of demotivation for learning FL.

The main benefit of this study is a fact that it is one of rare studies on demotivation for SFL learning in Croatia, especially in certain departments of the University of Dubrovnik. The shortcoming is purposeful and not so large sample of participants, with limited number of socio-demographic variables about the participants which are included in the poll. Having in mind that various learner attributes<sup>4</sup> display a considerable amount of contextual and temporal variation (variation from time to time and from situation to situation), the authors believe the results from this research would best be compared and utilised in further research of demotivation in the Croatian classroom context, focusing on and studying other programmes of study at the University of Dubrovnik and other Croatian universities. Future studies should draw up on larger and more representative samples of student population to share more light on the student demotivation in learning EFL, with better balanced gender representation. Moreover, the teachers should be involved in the research, enabling thus the determination of best measures for reducing demotivation and increasing motivation of our students.

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## DEMOTIVACIJA ZA UČENJE ENGLESKOG JEZIKA KOD SVEUČILIŠNIH STUDENATA

### SAŽETAK

Teorije o ovladavanju inim jezikom (SLA) različito ocjenjuju značaj individualnih faktora u procesu usvajanja jezika. Motivacija, kao i demotivacija, jedan je od bitnih faktora. Neupitna je važnost uloge motivacije u dugotrajnome i zahtjevnome procesu učenja jezika. Glavni cilj ovoga rada jest utvrditi postoje li povezanosti između faktora demotivacije (DM) za učenje engleskoga kao stranoga jezika s faktorima motivacije (M), kao i s određenim relevantnim varijablama. Drugi cilj je utvrditi postojanje razlika između faktora demotivacije u odnosu na spol, godinu studija i smjer studija. U tu svrhu, istraživanje je provedeno među studentima trogodišnjih preddiplomskih studija na dva sveučilišna odjela: Pomorskom odjelu i Odjelu za komunikologiju. Podatci su prikupljeni pomoću Upitnika za mjerenje tipa i intenziteta motivacije hrvatskih učenika za učenje engleskoga kao stranog jezika. Rezultati pokazuju da nema statistički značajnih razlika u faktorima demotivacije u odnosu na spol, smjer i godinu studija. Međutim, utvrđena je statistički značajna, umjereno visoka i negativna povezanost uporabno-komunikacijske i afektivne motivacije s demotivacijom, dok su ostale korelacije između demotivacije i motivacije vrlo niske. Osim toga, statistički značajna negativna i niska korelacija faktora demotivacije utvrđena je samo za treću godinu studija. Rezultati ovoga istraživanja ukazuju na potrebu daljnjih istraživanja u različitim obrazovnim kontekstima kako bi se stekle spoznaje o demotivaciji za učenje engleskoga kao stranoga jezika.